

JAMES 1:1-8 TRIALS

Trials and difficulties are a part of life; we cannot avoid them. **Trials are a crucible testing the quality of our character and faith, like refining gold in the fiery furnace. Rather than complain about these difficulties, we should welcome them as an opportunity to learn and grow into maturity.** We need to change our perspective and by faith see how God is using them to refine our Christian character so that we lack nothing, like 24 karats pure gold.

When we are confused and overwhelmed by these trials, we need to ask God for wisdom in how to grow and learn through them. We need to ask with total confidence in God's goodness and willingness to help us in time of need.

JAMES 1:13-18

Testings of our faith can become temptations that lure us away from trusting God's goodness. This happens when our selfish desires lure and entice us into thinking that God's way is not the best for us, that there must be a better way. While God does test us, he never tempts us or lures us into sin. **Temptation is an inside job that is conceived in our own selfish desires.** The best way to fight against these selfish desires is to rest in the solid conviction of the absolute, unchanging goodness of God. **God is good for us, and He is good all the time.**

JAMES 5:1-6

Rather than seeking to avoid or escape the suffering that trials bring us, we should patiently persevere through them. We can do this only when we see what God is doing in us through these trials. Remember, he is refining us like gold so that we are mature followers of Christ. **Patient perseverance means that we don't rush to resolve the problems of the trials, but we wait for God's timing like a farmer waits for the proper time to harvest his crops.** Like the Old Testament prophets like Job, we settle our hearts with the hope in the soon return of Christ. **More than escaping from the suffering of trials, we need to grasp the heart of God through suffering.**

JAMES 1:9-12

One of the trials or tests of faith we all face is the area of finances. A test of faith is like a crucible in which the fire refines and strengthens our faith. Our attitude toward finances has a great impact on how we see God's work in our lives. It is common for most people, rich and poor, to view finances as a means to provide for our daily needs. But **God's purposes in our finances is not financial.** His primary goal is not to teach us how to manage our finances wisely. **His primary purpose is to shape us and change us so that we reflect the values and character of Jesus Christ himself.** Jesus, who was rich, became poor so that we might become rich. We should rejoice and boast that we can learn not to rely on our wealth, but totally trust God to provide for our needs and to transform us into his image.

JAMES 2:1-13

How does true faith in Christ affect the way we look at and judge people? In the natural world we are prone to treat people with partiality. We pay attention to the rich and wealthy and we ignore and marginalize the weak and poor. We make distinctions about people and judge them with evil intentions. But we will be judged by the same standard with which we judge others. **True faith in Christ means that we should set aside peoples' face value to embrace their created value.** They are created in the image of God, and therefore, all people are valuable in God's eyes. It is a sin, therefore, to judge people with partiality.

JAMES 5:1-6

James gives his harshest warning to the rich in James 5. These are the self-centered people who think that life is their party and they should receive all the gifts. James does not say it is wrong to be rich, but that it is a sin to be greedy. **Greed is self-indulgent hoarding of money or materials at the expense of others.** Exploiting others in order to gain wealth is wrong. **Greed is such a corrosive sin because it reveals that we treasure material riches above our relationship with Christ.** Greed and exploitation are contrary to the great commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. **Greed and exploitation are a denial of the very essence of the gospel.** Christ, who was rich, became poor, so that we might become rich in Christ. This is the gospel of grace which is denied by selfish greed.

JAMES 3:1-12

James bluntly says that we need to bridle our tongue, bring it under control. This is important for several reasons: **our words have a powerful influence over others and can guide them to great evil or great good.** Adolf Hitler and Winston Churchill were great orators who led their nations by the force of their rhetoric. Words can inflame and destroy others, like untamed animals or raging forest fires. **Words come up from the inner core of our being, and they reveal the brokenness of our sinful character,** like water flowing forth from a spring. But a salty spring cannot produce sweet water, neither can a sinful character produce honest true and kind words. Therefore, it is impossible to control our tongue and our words completely. **But we must discipline ourselves to avoid slander and gossip, contemptuous words of hate and prejudice, and all carnal and filthy language. We can do this by pausing before we speak; be slow to speak. We can do this by prayer, asking God to cleanse our sinful lips with his atoning sacrifice on the cross.**

JAMES 4:1-10

Quarreling and fighting among believers is a problem of the tongue. James says that these **wars of words come out of a heart that is full of conflicting desires.** Our hearts are conflicted with selfish passions and desires that are not being satisfied. And so, we are at war with ourselves. And then we see others who have what we want. We envy them and want what they have. And so, we fight with them. **But the basic issue is that when we desire the things of this world, we are in conflict with God. Friendship with the world makes us an enemy of God.** Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. Receive a new heart by faith through God's grace, and focus on pleasing God.

JAMES 4:11-17

A self-centered person thinks that life is a party just for them where they should receive all the gifts. Conceited people feel superior and put themselves above the law of God. In their judgmental attitude, they speak slanderous words to put others down so that they can look better. Slanderous, judgmental speech comes out of a self-centered heart. We do not have the right to judge others. Only God, who established the principles of the law, can judge others impartially.

A self-centered person also falls into the sin of making plans for the future without acknowledging God in his plans. Only a fool makes plans without considering the plans that God has for him. We must realize that our lives are limited and fragile as grass of the field. It withers and is gone in a short time. It is wise to submit to God's will and live in sync with his plans for us. Failure to do the right thing in these areas is sin before God. We should celebrate God in our speech and in our plans.

JAMES 1:19-26

A true Christian life is shaped by the Word of God. The Word of God implanted in our hearts has the power to save us and change us into Christ-like people. **Therefore, we should receive God's word with quiet humility. And then, we must actively put it into practice and make it the rule of our daily lives.** James mentions three things that will change in our lives if our faith is genuine: we will seek to control or bridle our tongues, we will open our hearts to others with compassion, and we will pursue the holiness of God. **This is what it means to work out our faith in our daily lives.**

JAMES 2:14-26

What is genuine faith that saves? Can we believe and still not be saved? James describes some false faiths. There is dead faith that does nothing to help those in need. There is demon orthodox faith that believes in God but does not follow him. There is useless faith that changes nothing in the way you live. Faith that does not produce positive acts of love and godliness in your life is not genuine faith. **Faithful works flow out of saving faith.** Paul argues that works have no value in producing salvation. And James argues that faithful works necessarily flow out of salvation. **Faith without works flowing out of it is dead.**

JAMES 3:13-18

Wisdom is the way we apply knowledge, experience and insight to our daily lives. It is revealed in the decisions we make and the way we live. Wisdom from God is peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. Worldly wisdom is full of jealousy and selfish ambition that leads to disorder and every vile practice. **We can only have God's wisdom if we surrender our own.**